

Questions and Answers:

Q: Why are you doing the Environmental Assessment?

A: The Army is doing the analyses to determine the potential environmental and socioeconomic effects of a series of proposed actions to support the capture, testing for Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA), and eventual disposition of trespass horses from the Fort Polk Military Reservation and the Peason Ridge Military Training Area. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Army regulations, the Army is required to seek input from interested agencies, organizations, and individuals through scoping to involve the public in the decision-making process for preparing an t Environmental Assessment (EA) to include alternative actions and issues of concern to be considered and analyzed.

Q: How can the public participate in this EA?

The Army encourages public input during the scoping process and the comment period to address issue of concerns on this action. To aid the Army in identifying and evaluating issues and concerns, comments should be as specific as possible. Please submit comments to the address shown below no later than May 15 so that your comments and ideas can be addressed in the EA.

JRTC and Fort Polk
Public Affairs Office
Attention: Mr. Dan Nance
7073 Radio Road
Fort Polk, LA 71459-5432

Or by email to horses@polk.army.mil

Public meetings will be held in Leesville, LA and Baton Rouge, LA to receive public input on issues of concern and alternative courses of action. The Leesville meeting will be held from 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, April 13 in the Landmark Hotel, 3080 Colony Blvd. The Baton Rouge meeting will be held from 3-6 p.m. Thursday, April 15 in the AmeriSuites Hotel, 6080 Bluebonnet Blvd. These meetings will be conducted in an "open house" type forum at which information booths will be established and public comment forms made available. The public can come and go at their convenience during the three-hour timeframe of the meetings.

Q: What alternatives will be considered?

A: A wide range of alternatives to include no action will be considered as identified in the public scoping phase of the Environmental Assessment.

Q: Weren't you ordered to do this EA by the courts?

A: A lawsuit filed by the Coalition of Louisiana Animal Activists resulted in a settlement that upheld the status of the horses as trespass animals and required Fort Polk to conduct an Environmental Assessment (EA) before taking any action regarding the horses. However, we view the EA as a win-win situation because it gives Fort Polk a chance to consider issues of concern and reasonable alternative actions identified by the public, appropriate government agencies, and subject matter experts before making a decision about this issue. The Army encourages public input on this issue as well as the participation of animal welfare groups and other subject matter experts in developing an appropriate course of action in regards to this issue.

Q: Do you plan to attempt another effort to capture, remove the horses, and adopt them out using the local humane society?

A: We won't make a decision about this issue until after completion of the EA and careful consideration of issues of concern and reasonable alternatives. Certainly one option could be capture, removal, and adoption of the horses. Another alternative could be to take no action. The point is we will consider a range of alternatives as part of the EA process.

Q: Do you plan to continue to work with the Humane Society of West LA?

A: We worked closely with the HSWL previously and hope to continue our strong working relationship with this group. Additionally, we encourage the participation of other animal welfare groups and other subject matter experts in identifying issues of concern and potential courses of action regarding the EA. We will use this input and the analysis to determine the appropriate course of action in regarding this issue.

Q: What provisions will Fort Polk take to ensure humane care and treatment of these horses should you decide to capture and remove them?

A: Humane treatment of the horses will continue to be a priority. For example, if a decision is made to capture the horses by contract we hope to receive public comments regarding contract specifications that would help ensure humane treatment of the horses.

Q: What about horses on Fort Polk that belong to area residents? Can they claim them and if so, how would you ensure that the horses actually belong to these individuals?

A: Certainly this is an issue we could consider as part of the EA.

Q: Some are critical of the state's 100 percent testing policy and with EIA-positive horses having to be euthanized. How do you respond to that criticism?

A: Refer to the State Dept. of Agriculture and Forestry.

Q: If Fort Polk uses a contractor to capture and care for these animals, how will you ensure that a qualified contractor is picked for the job? Will you select based on experience and proven record?

A: It's a bit premature to discuss contract specifications because there is no decision at this point to capture by contract. However, as part of our prudent planning efforts, we will receive input from public, agency, and subject matter experts on contract specifications that will ensure the contractor can accomplish the work in a safe, effective, and humane manner. But I must emphasize, the fact that we are receiving input on potential contract specifications does not mean we are pre-disposed to select an alternative that includes capture by contract. Again, no decision will be made until the EA has been completed and after consideration of public input on issues of concern and reasonable alternatives.

Q: If you decide to capture the horses, what capture methods will you use? If you will dart them, what medication will be used and is it the safest, most reliable product available? What other capture methods will you use? What conditions will cause you to select a specific capture method over another?

A: No decision has been made regarding this issue and certainly capture methods would be part of the analysis for alternatives that include capture of the horses. But I must emphasize that we will consider a range of alternatives to include no action.

Q: On what authority are you claiming that these horses are “trespass” or “abandoned” horses not covered by the National Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971?

A: A: We believe the recent federal court settlement affirms that the horses are trespass and that they do not fall under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. Additionally, The US Department of Agriculture has determined that these horses do not fall under the Wild Horse and Burro Act because there is no record of any horses, other than trespass horses in the area prior to passage of the 1971 act. The Kisatchie National Forest was not considered as being a territory of wild horses and burros.

Q: How will you prevent healthy horses from being sent either directly or indirectly through your actions to slaughterhouses?

A: Certainly our goal would be that no healthy horse is taken to slaughter and we will consider all public, agency, and subject matter expert input on the best course of action regarding this issue.